

LEARNING MADE EASY



3rd Edition

# Public Relations

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
A Wiley Brand



Understand  
the PR process

Choose the right tactics  
to meet your goals

Use social media to  
build your brand

**Eric Yaverbaum**

PR veteran, CEO of Ericho  
Communications, and fitness fanatic  
with **James Palmer** and **Bob Bly**



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dummies®**  
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**by Eric Yaverbaum**

PR veteran, CEO of Ericho Communications

**with James Palmer and Bob Bly**

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## Public Relations For Dummies®, 3rd Edition

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# Introduction

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**W**hoever you are, wherever you are, public relations directly impacts your life.

If you're a small-business owner, emerging influencer, early-stage startup founder, or aspiring entrepreneur, PR helps level the playing field between you and your bigger, wealthier competitors. You may not be able to afford a 30-second commercial during the Super Bowl, but if you launch a football-themed social media campaign that goes viral *before* the Super Bowl, you can get publicity on the front page or something that goes viral based on your PR savvy.

If you're a corporate manager or executive, you've seen ad costs skyrocket, priorities shift away from print and television in favor of digital, and social media transform how you interact with consumers. With an effective public relations program, you can communicate with your target market *more* often and effectively, not less, without increasing spending.

And if you're a consumer, public relations plays a role in your habits, spending, and the formation of your opinions often without your even being aware of it. Did you know that half or more of everything you read, see, and hear almost anywhere online was put there through the actions of a public relations manager or a PR firm? PR has an enormous impact on the information you get every day of your life.

I wrote this new edition of *Public Relations For Dummies* precisely because I know that PR isn't magic — it's a skill that can be mastered like any other — and that a do-it-yourself approach isn't only viable but also sensible for many businesses and entrepreneurs. What Wilford Brimley said about Quaker Oats applies equally to doing your own PR for many readers of this book: "It's the right thing to do." And just as eating a nutritious breakfast is the right way to start off your day, this handy guide shows all you PR DIYers out there the right way to start making PR work for you.

The key to getting media coverage is to offer them a story that they can't resist. The two key elements are an understanding of the marketing message and the ability to think creatively in terms of PR campaigns. You already understand your business's market, and I'm convinced that, with enough practice, almost anyone can think more creatively. The mechanics of PR — and a lot of sample campaigns

to inspire you — are laid out in this book, so you already have everything you need to do your own PR, and you don't need to hire an agency if you don't want to.

## About This Book

You can think of this newest edition of *Public Relations For Dummies* as “your PR agency in a box.” This edition gives you all the tools you need to do your own PR — ideas, checklists, forms, documents, and resources — presented in a clear, easy-to-use package. With this book, you can get your product or service featured whenever and wherever you want — in newspapers, magazines, and trade journals; on TV, radio, podcasts, and social media — so that people find out about what you're offering and come to you to buy it. The result? More fame, recognition, awareness, inquiries, orders, sales — and money!

Can you do your own PR? Yes. Thousands of small- and medium-sized businesses conduct successful PR campaigns every day, for pennies on the dollar compared to what they'd pay for a similar amount of advertising. Large corporations also are doing an increasing amount of PR in-house. This book helps you succeed on your own. You don't need me, my PR agency, or any other PR agency, if you're willing to put in the effort and follow the simple guidelines presented here.

In this new edition, I discuss:

- » The importance of online media in PR
- » How to get your message out on blogs, podcasts, and social media
- » What the changing media landscape looks like
- » How to take the reins of new and emerging technology like AI and blockchain
- » How to leverage buzz, viral, and influencer marketing
- » What to do in a PR crisis

## Foolish Assumptions

Whether you want to put out a single press release to announce your grand opening or plan an ongoing PR campaign, I make the following assumptions about you as I wrote this book:

- » You may plan on keeping your product name in the public eye for many years to come through your own efforts.
- » You may prefer to have someone do your PR for you.
- » You may have a big budget and special contacts with the media.
- » You may have a small budget and no contacts with the media.
- » You may have little or no experience.
- » You may have substantial experience.
- » You have a desk, a computer, and your wits — this book supplies most of the rest or tells you where to get it.

## Icons Used in This Book

As if this book weren't already easy to use, I also include some icons that flag different pieces of information for you.



REMEMBER

This icon marks important items you don't want to forget.



TIP

This icon points out special tips and insights.



WARNING

The icon warns you about potential mistakes you want to avoid.



WIN/WIN

The icon highlights best practices — things you should regularly do as a PR practitioner.

## Beyond This Book

You can discover more information, including the book's Cheat Sheet, at [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com). Just search for "Public Relations For Dummies Cheat Sheet" for details that you can refer to again and again. You can also find two bonus Part of Tens chapters there.

# Where to Go from Here

You may use this book to create the one or two PR programs you want to do, execute them, and get great results — and that may be it. That's okay, and it's the beauty of PR. With its low cost and the ease with which you can do your own PR without professional help, even a single PR effort can generate tremendous returns, paying back your investment in this kit a hundred times over.

You can read through this book, start to finish, or you can start with the chapters that interest you the most. It's up to you. I suggest you flip through the Table of Contents or index, find a topic that piques your interest, and head to that chapter.

My hope is that your newfound enthusiasm for the PR process spurs you to try more and more of the ideas and strategies presented here. When you do, you'll magnify your results, make your company famous, and get more business than you can handle. What a nice problem to have!

I also hope you aggressively embrace and pursue the many PR opportunities available to your organization on a regular basis. Why pay the media a fortune every time you want them to carry your message with a paid advertisement, when in essence you can get them to do all your advertising for you absolutely free?

The bottom line: PR can communicate your company's message and help you achieve your marketing objectives at a fraction of the cost of paid advertising. Any business or organization that sells or markets but doesn't take advantage of the incredible leverage of free publicity is pouring marketing dollars down the drain. But it's never too late to start. So dip into this guide, put the ideas to work, make your organization or product famous, and get rich. If you become a millionaire or celebrity in the process, more power to you!

# 1

## **PR: What It Is, How It Works**

#### **IN THIS PART . . .**

Discover the power of PR and realize that it's more than just publicity stunts.

Understand who needs PR and why.

Gain an understanding of how PR and the media work together.

Master the four Ps of marketing.

Discover when to use PR.

Understand the ever-evolving role of PR in media and marketing.

Become proficient in working with PR professionals.

Define your PR goals.



- » Defining public relations
- » Discovering who needs PR
- » Exploring what a PR professional does
- » Examining the differences between PR and advertising

## Chapter 1

# Understanding the Power of PR

**W**hen I was a young man of 24 and almost a complete beginner at public relations, I got my photo on the front page of *USA Today* with a feature story about the 1985 baseball strike. That piece put my then-fledgling PR firm on the map, so to speak, and helped advance my career in PR.

At the time, no one had heard of my agency or me, and I had no press contacts with *USA Today* — or any other major media. That lack of contacts could easily have become a major stumbling block for my PR firm: The agency did good work, but larger corporate prospects would naturally — and in my opinion, naively — ask, “Who are your media contacts?” When I confessed that I didn’t personally know the editor in chief of the *New York Times* and wasn’t invited to Oprah’s dinner parties, potential clients could have easily lost interest and chosen other firms. This problem was one I wanted to solve as quickly as possible.

So how did I get *USA Today* to put my picture on the front page? At the time, an MLB strike was the news of the day. My partner and I issued a press release and called the media to announce that we had formed a new organization, called Strike Back, to protest the baseball strike. The premise was simple: After the strike, we’d boycott a day of games for every day the league failed to negotiate a deal.

Did I do this for the love of the game? Yes — partially. But it certainly wasn't lost on me that turning ourselves into a national news story would (1) demonstrate the type of PR we practice, (2) showcase our ability to get media exposure, and (3) attract new business. *USA Today* was the first big media placement for my agency, and it got potential clients to pay attention to the new kids on the PR block.

This anecdote illustrates four basic PR principles that form the core of my agency's philosophy and the how-to PR techniques in this book:

- » **You have to be different.** The media and the public are drowning in information but starved for amusement. Conventional publicity strategies get lost in the noise. You have to find a creative way to stand out from the crowd and get noticed: Strike Back is just one of dozens of examples of this in practice illustrated throughout this book.
- » **You have to be authentic.** You can't simply be different for the sake of being different. You have to pin down who you are, what you believe in, and what makes your company or client unique. That's how you define a brand and find your spark. Then own it and stay true to it.
- » **Getting publicity is great, but it's a waste of time and money if it doesn't help you achieve your business objectives.** If getting on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal* doesn't help you make more money or increase your company's market share, is it really worth the trouble? In the case of Strike Back, the campaign did achieve a specific objective: getting corporate PR clients to take my PR firm seriously and hire us, despite the fact that we had fewer clients, fewer years of experience, and a fraction of the media contacts of the big PR firms.
- » **You don't have to have media contacts to get big-time publicity.** Strike Back perfectly demonstrates this principle — and it helped my firm convince potential clients that contacts weren't nearly as important as ideas. A creative idea, a clear marketing goal, and effective implementation are what count. You don't have to know the hosts of *Good Morning America* to get on the show; you just have to come up with an idea that will interest the show's producers.

This chapter serves as the jumping-off point to the world of public relations and how you can get all the publicity you need to achieve your business objectives — without making public relations your full-time job (though maybe you'll want to after you finish this book).

## Recognizing Who Needs PR

If you have all the business you'll ever want, are rich beyond the dreams of avarice, and don't care what others think of you, you may not need public relations.

A crisis is an obvious exception. A lot of my work as a PR professional is in response to clients who have an immediate PR crisis to solve, like a negative customer experience that goes viral or a toy posing an unexpected safety risk to children because of a product defect. And the thing about crisis planning is that it's something you need to do before you have a crisis. So in many cases, even if your sales are skyrocketing and you don't need to promote yourself, you may want to engage in PR activities to prevent negative publicity or correct any bad press that comes your way. (See Chapter 21 on crisis management.) Other broad reasons a business or person may want to use PR include

- » To grow the business
- » To win over investors
- » To increase sales

Doctors, lawyers, creators, artists, restaurant owners, real estate agents, and practically every other type of professional can use public relations to promote their businesses. PR is effective in virtually every category, from construction to technology to fitness, wellness, and beauty to retail, healthcare, insurance, tourism, real estate, and investments. Every type of business stands to benefit enormously from the power of PR.

Here are a few benefits to using PR:

- » **Its ability to further a business's long-term goals:** PR can help take a business from where they are now to where they want to be six months, a year, or a decade from now. Good PR can turn marginal businesses into profitable ones and ordinary folks into millionaires.
- » **Its efficient use of resources:** PR is *earned* media and can therefore get your business in a publication at a fraction of the price it would cost for ad space. If a business has an unlimited advertising budget and it won't miss the money spent, it can probably get its message across without relying on the subtler medium of PR. That doesn't mean it *shouldn't* use PR as part of its marketing mix, however: Many clients find that a relatively modest investment in PR greatly extends the reach of their total promotional program.
- » **Its incredible ability to meaningfully connect with audiences, sway minds, and influence public perception:** In this regard, PR is far more effective than paid media.



REMEMBER

Cost is one of the great appeals of PR to both small businesses and large corporations alike. Small businesses with limited budgets simply can't come close to matching the ad budgets of larger competitors. PR can help them level the playing field and get the same or better promotional bang for a lot fewer bucks.

As for the big companies, if you work for one, you know that getting more money in the marketing budget can be an uphill battle. With PR, you can achieve the objectives senior managers want even if they don't give you the money you think you need to do it.

## Beyond Stunts: Identifying the Real Value of PR

Publicity stunts can be a lot of fun. They're exciting, flashy, and full of spectacle. But in reality, they're just a small part of what PR entails. PR does, of course, include headline-grabbing stunts and star-studded events. (See Chapter 19 for more on staging publicity events.) But the real meat and potatoes of PR isn't about celebrities and big budget extravaganzas.

In fact, that's the easy part of public relations. The true value of PR is its ability to solve real-world marketing problems for any product, service, organization, brand, or public figure. For instance, if your sales are inconsistent — with big jumps during marketing pushes followed by prolonged slumps — you need to find a way to increase the frequency of marketing efforts without having to spend a whole lot more money. PR is perhaps the best means of getting your message out on a continual basis and eliminating periodic sales slumps, and you can do it without having to significantly increase your marketing budget.



REMEMBER

With enough creativity, PR can work for any and every industry, from florists to funeral directors, software to soft serve. Any organization or individual with a message to deliver or a goal to achieve can benefit from PR. Indeed, the real magic of PR is in its practical applications for everyday businesspeople. You don't even need a communications degree or special certification to practice PR.



WIN/WIN

You don't need a flashy or unusual product to gain publicity; you just need a creative idea that meets two criteria:

- » It's newsworthy.
- » It communicates the marketing message.

Creative PR, with proper execution, can work wonders for manufacturers, creators, distributors, retailers, tradespeople, service companies, and professional practices in any industry. The chapters in Part 2 delve deeper into creative thinking, but here's a quick example.

For example, British Knights wanted a way to sell more of its sneakers to kids. As a seasonal promotion, the company sent out press releases announcing an unusual “Summer Exchange” program: Parents who were concerned that their kids were spending too much time indoors watching TV and playing video games, rather than playing outdoors, could mail British Knights their TV remote control and receive in return a brand-new pair of British Knight sneakers. (The remote control was mailed back to participants with the sneakers at the end of the summer.)

In another successful PR campaign, British Knights sponsored a World’s Smelliest Socks Contest. The top ten winners — individuals who sent in the stinkiest socks — won free British Knights sneakers for three years.

Joseph J. Kelley, a speechwriter for President Dwight Eisenhower, once said, “There is a kernel of interest in everything God created.” How true! Every product or service, no matter how mundane, contains a PR hook or angle if you think creatively. Even sneakers.

## Addressing the Relationship between PR and the Media

PR is what’s known as *earned* media, whereas traditional advertising is *paid* media. Publicity isn’t simply free advertising though — it’s legitimate news. By alerting the media to newsworthy events, products, services, and people, you can prompt a journalist (a reporter, editor, producer) to cover everything from the opening of a new restaurant to the launch of a new product, from groundbreaking scientific discoveries to the makings of the latest trend.

In the early days of public relations, many PR practitioners held the belief that their job was to get the client’s name in the papers as prominently and frequently as they could. George M. Cohan, the famous composer, knew how PR worked. “I don’t care what they [the media] call me,” he said, “so long as they mention my name.” Actress Katharine Hepburn gave that idea a twist, remarking, “I don’t care what is written about me so long as it isn’t true.”

According to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), *public relations* is “a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.” Yet another definition states, “Public relations is the business of creating public opinion for private advantage.” At my PR agency, Ericho Communications, we think of PR in more straightforward, practical terms: strategically using earned media to achieve a client’s marketing objective. By practicing what you find in this book, you can use PR to

communicate your message, build your brand, tell your story, influence public perception, motivate desired behavior, and generate greater revenues and profits.

Instead of paying for billboards, ad space, or airtime, PR practitioners persuade the media to cover stories that promote their clients' goals — whether it's to attract venture capital for a tech startup or help a pizza chain sell more pizzas. Those with a more cynical view of PR might say that PR practitioners exploit the media on their clients' behalf. But strictly speaking, that isn't true, because it's the media — not the publicist — who is the final judge of what makes the news.

More accurately, public relations is, at its best, a win-win partnership among publicists, the clients they promote, and journalists. Here's how that partnership works:

Journalists have too much to do and not enough time to do it. Every day, they must fill pages or airtime with stories that interest, entertain, and inform their readership, viewers, or listeners. The deadlines are too tight, and the editors and reporters are overworked.

Publicists step in and help by providing what journalists need — ideas, information, interviews, and even ready-made stories — in abundant supply and absolutely free. The media choose from among the press releases and pitches, use the most newsworthy and relevant to inform stories, and discard the rest — with no obligation to the publicists who supply the releases. The media can identify stories, access sources, meet deadlines, keep their audiences informed and entertained, and thereby deliver a large audience to their advertisers. (To find out how to write press releases and pitches that interest the media, see Chapters 8 and 9.)

## Publicity Plus: Exploring the Many Components of PR

Public relations is more than just pitching stories to the media or sending out press releases. The PR umbrella covers a wide range of activities, all of which are concerned with communicating specific messages to specific target audiences. Broadly, the PR person (or team) is responsible for managing communications between their company or client and the public.

Public relations typically encompasses the following:

» **Research:** You have to thoroughly understand not only your company or clients, but also your industry, competition, customers and potential